

Black Women who were Lynched in America

(Partial List)

Printed as a community service by Dr. Daniel Meaders, Professor of History at William Paterson University, and author of several books and articles, including *Dead or Alive: Fugitive Slaves and White Indentured Servants Before 1800* (Garland Press, 1993)

Jennie Steers

In 1903, a mob lynched Jennie Steers of Louisiana for supposedly giving a white teenager a glass of poisoned lemonade. Before they killed her, the mob tried to force her to confess but she refused. (100 Years of Lynching, Ralph Ginzburg)

Laura Nelson

Laura Nelson was lynched on May 23, 1911 in Okemah, Okfuskee, Oklahoma. Her fifteen year old son was also lynched at the same time but I could not find a photo of her son. The photograph of Nelson was drawn from a postcard. Authorities accused her of killing a deputy sheriff who supposedly stumbled on some stolen goods in her house. Why they lynched her child is a mystery. The mob raped and dragged Nelson six miles to the Canadian River and hanged her from a bridge. (NAACP: One Hundred Years of Lynching in the US 1889-1918)



Ann Barksdale or Ann Bostwick

The lynchers maintained that Ann Barksdale or Ann Bostwick killed her female employer in Georgia in 1912. Nobody knows if or why Barksdale or Bostick killed her employer because there was no trial and no one thought to take a statement from this Black woman who authorities claimed had "violent fits of insanity" and should have been placed in a hospital. Nobody was arrested and the crowd was in a festive mood. Placed in a car with a rope around her neck, and the other end tied to a tree limb, the lynchers drove at high speed and she was strangled to death. For good measure the mob shot her eyes out and shot enough bullets into her body that she was "cut in two."

Maria Scott

In 1914, a white mob yanked seventeen year-old Maria Scott from jail and hanged her from a telephone pole in Wagoner county, Oklahoma. What happened? Two white men barged into her house and one "assaulted" her. Her brother apparently killed the assailant and fled. Frustrated by their inability to lynch Maria Scott's brother the mob lynched Maria Scott. (Crisis, 1914)

Mary Turner 1918 Eight Months Pregnant

Mobs lynched Mary Turner on May 17, 1918 in Lowndes County, Georgia because she tried to stop them from killing her husband, accused of shooting and killing Hampton Smith, a white farmer, and wounding his wife. Sidney Johnson, a Black, apparently killed Smith because he was tired of the farmer's abuse. Unable to find Johnson, the killers lynched eight other Blacks including Hayes Turner and his wife Mary. The mob hanged Mary by her feet, poured gasoline and oil on her and set fire to her body. One white man sliced her open and Mrs. Turner's baby tumbled to the ground with a "little cry" and the mob stomped the baby to death and sprayed bullets into Mary Turner. (NAACP: Thirty Years of Lynching in the U.S. 1889-1918)

Maggie Howze and Alma Howze -Both Pregnant

Accused of the murder of Dr. E.L. Johnston in December 1918, whites lynched Andrew Clark, age 15, Major Clark, age 20, Maggie Howze, age 20, and Alma Howze, age 16 from a bridge near Shubuta, a town in Mississippi. The local press described Johnston as being a wealthy dentist, but he did not have an established business in the true sense of the word. He sought patients by riding his buggy throughout the community offering his services to the public at large in Alabama. Unable to make money "peddling" dentistry, the dentist returned to

Mississippi to work on his father's land near Shabuta. During his travels he had developed an intimate relationship with Maggie Howze, a Black woman who he had asked to move and lived with him. He also asked that she bring her sister Alma Howze along. While using the Black young women as sexual objects Johnston impregnated both of them though he was married and had a child. Three Black laborers worked on Johnston's plantation, two of whom were brothers, Major and Andrew Clark. Major tried to court Maggie, but Johnston was violently opposed to her trying to create a world of her own that did not include him. To block a threat to his sexual fiefdom, Johnston threaten Clark's life. Shortly after Johnston turned up dead and the finger was pointed at Major Clark and the Howze sisters. The whites picked up Major, his brother, Maggie and her sister and threw them in jail. To extract an confession from Major Clark, the authorities placed his testicles between the "jaws of a vise" and slowly closed it until Clark admitted that he killed Johnston. White community members took the four Blacks out of jail, placed them in a automobile, turned the head lights out and headed to the lynching site. Eighteen other cars, carrying members of the mob, followed close behind. Someone shut the power plant down and the town fell into darkness. Ropes were placed around the necks of the four Blacks and the other ends tied to the girder of the bridge. Maggie Howze cried that she "I aint guilty of killing the doctor and you oughtn't to kill me." Someone took a monkey wrench and "stuck her in the mouth with it, knocking her teeth out.. She was also hit across the head with the same instrument, cutting a long gash in which the side of a person's hand could be placed." While the three other Blacks were killed instantly, Maggie Howze, four months pregnant, managed to grab the side of the bridge to break her fall. She did this twice before she died and mob joked about how difficult it was to killed that "big Jersey woman." No one stepped forward to claim the bodies. No one held funeral services for the victims. The Black community demanded that the whites cut them down and bury them because they "lynched them." The whites placed them in unmarked graves. Alma Howze was on the verge of giving birth when the whites killed her. One witness claimed that at her "burial on the second day following, that the movements of her unborn child could be detected." Keep in mind that Johnston's parents felt that the Blacks had nothing to do with their son's death and that some irate white man killed him, knowing that the blame would fall on the Black's shoulders. The indefatigable Walter White, NAACP secretary, visited the scene of the execution and crafted

the report. He pressed Governor Bilbo of Mississippi to look into the lynching and Bilbo told the NAACP to go to hell. (NAACP: Thirty Years of Lynching in the U.S., 1889-1918) (Papers of the NAACP)

Holbert Burnt at the Stake

Luther Holbert, a Black, supposedly killed James Eastland, a wealthy planter who lived near Doddsville Mississippi. After a hundred mile chase, the mob caught Luther and his wife and lled them both to trees. They chopped off their fingers one at a time, cut off their ears, and pulled out pieces of their flesh with a bore screw and kept them for souvenirs. (100 Years of Lynching Ralph Ginzburg)

WHO ARE OUR REAL HEROES?

American mobs lynched some 5,000 Blacks since 1859, scores of whom were women, several of them pregnant. Rarely did the killers spend time in jail because the white mobs and the government officials who protected them believed justice meant (just us) white folks. Lynching denied Blacks the right to a trial or the right to due process. No need for a lawyer and a jury of your peers; the white community decided what happened and what ought to be done. After the whites accused Laura Nelson of killing a white deputy in Oklahoma, they raped this Black woman, tied her to a bridge trestle and for good measure, they lynched her son from a telephone pole. Had the white community reacted in horror after viewing the dangling corpses of Laura Nelson and her son? No, they came by the hundreds, making their way by cars, horse driven wagons, and by foot to view the lynching. Dressed in their Sunday best, holding their children's hands and hugging their babies the white on-lookers looked forward to witnessing the spectacle of a modern day crucifixion. They snapped pictures of Laura Nelson, placed them on postcards and mailed them to their friends boasting about the execution. They chopped off the fingers, sliced off the ears of Ms. Holbert, placed the parts in jars of alcohol and displayed them in their windows.

White America today know little or nothing about lynching because it contradicts every value America purports to stand for. Blacks, too, know far too little about the lynchings because the subject is rarely taught in school. Had they known more about these lynchings, I am almost certain that Blacks would have taken anyone to task, including gangster rappers, for calling themselves niggers or calling Black women "hoes" and "bitches." How could anybody in their right mind call these Black women who were sexually abused,

mutilated, tortured and mocked the same degrading names that the psychopathic lynchers called them? What Black woman in her right state of mind would snap her fingers or tap her feet to the beat of a song that contained the same degrading remarks that the whites uttered when they raped and lynched them. The lynchers and the thousands of gleeful spectators called these Black women niggers when they captured them, niggers when they placed the rope around their necks and niggers when their necks snapped. Whites viewed Black women as hated black things, for, how else can one explain the treatment of Mary Turner? The lynch mob ignored her cries for mercy, ripped off her clothes, tied her ankles together, turned her upside down, doused her naked body with gas and oil, set her naked body on fire, ripped her baby out of her, stomped the child to death and laughed about it. Blacks purchased Winchesters to protect themselves, staged demonstrations, created anti-lynching organizations, pushed for anti-lynching legislation and published articles and books attacking the extralegal violence. Many packed up, left the community never to return again. Others went through bouts of sadness, despair, and grief. Some broke down, a few went insane. Others probably fell on their knees, put their hands together, closed their eyes and begged Jesus for help. Jesus help us. Do not forsake us. But Jesus, the same white man the lyncher's ancestors taught us to love, never flew out of the bush in a flame of fire armed with frogs and flies and locusts to save Mary Turner. No thunder, no rain, no hail and no fire blocked the lynchers from hanging Laura Nelson. He did not see the "affliction" of the Holberts; he did not hear the screams of Marie Scott or the cry of Jennifer Steers.

So who are our real heroes? Little Kim is not a hero. Oprah is not a hero. Whoopie Goldberg is not a hero. Michael Jordan is not a hero. Dennis Rodman is not a hero. They are entertainers, sport figures, creations of the media, media icons and they are about making huge sums of money and we wish these enterprising stars well. Mary Turner, Laura Nelson, Marie Scott and Jennie Steers are your true historical heroes. Niggers they were not. Bitches they were not. Hoes they were not. They will not go down in history for plastering their bodies with tattoos, inventing exotic diets, endorsing Gator Ade, embracing studio gangsterism. They were strong beautiful Black women who suffered excruciating pain, died horrible deaths. Their legacy of strength lives on. These are my heroes. Make them yours as well.

Please do not throw this away. Give it to a friend or a relative. Peace.

Laura Nelson



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